



Executive Chef Adam Goldgell

## Food fight to the finish

East Rockaway chef featured on T.V.'s Restaurant Express

By **Mary Malloy**

Adam Goldgell, 47, is in it to win it. After making it through five elimination rounds on the Food Network's popular reality show "Restaurant Express," he said that being a big eater has made him a better chef, adding, "A lot of chefs haven't had the chance to sample food the way I have."

Goldgell, a former entertainer who is now the executive chef at Reel — formerly The Fishery — in East Rockaway, said he didn't get serious about cooking until he was 30, when he attended the Culinary Institute of America.

"I like to eat, and I like to cook," he said. "I'm a very eclectic chef. I love cooking ethnic food, Mediterranean, Asian, Indian food ... I like to use world influences."

Goldgell grew up in the kitchens of New York. He worked alongside his father at the family's gourmet sandwich shop in Brooklyn, and at a 200-seat cafe in Tribeca. He has worked in some of the country's most critically acclaimed restaurants, including Long Island's four-star Panama Hattie's in Huntington.

"Cooking is about sharing passion and [giving] joy to people I'm feeding," Goldgell said. "And it's new and different every night."

The New York Times awarded Goldgell three stars during his tenure as executive chef at Sugo, in Long Beach. He has since owned two successful barbecue restaurants and a gourmet burger restaurant. He has also run a full-service golf course catering facility and restaurant, serving his signature dishes.

Cooking wasn't always his passion, though. For years, Goldgell, who now lives in St. James, performed as a clown, having studied with a Ringling Brothers trouper, and did magic and hypnosis. He started a production company, the New York Fun Factory, which became one of the largest special-events companies on the East Coast. He was also a card shark at age 14 — the movie "Rounders," he said, is based on him and a dozen others like him who played in the underground clubs of New York. "They'd have a kitchen to attract players," he said. "And I would cook for everyone."

## **'Restaurant Express'**

The reality show, which debuted last month on the Food Network, is hosted by celebrity chef Robert Irvine. Each week, on a culinary road trip across the West, contestants must prove not only their culinary chops but also their business savvy if they want to keep a seat on the bus. The final drop-off point, and the ultimate prize, is the winner's own restaurant — and a contract with M Resort and Casino.

In the fifth episode, "Going, Going, Gone!" which aired last Sunday, the four remaining contestants (there were once nine) were given their biggest budget challenge: create a supper club with \$1,000 and an empty restaurant. They first attended an auction featuring items that could be a big benefit during dinner service, challenging them to spend wisely and with enough money left over for food and supplies. Goldgell was the winner.

"We have different challenges every week," he said. "We could be designing a restaurant, cooking meals, planning a décor ... it's always different and fun."

Reeling them in

Since coming to Reel, Goldgell, who has also appeared on the Food Network's popular competition show "Chopped," appears to have boosted the morale of residents who have seen a lot of hardships lately in their waterfront community. Customers are now asking him for his autograph.

"I'm enjoying working at Reel," he said. "In East Rockaway, the people seem to all know each other, and there's a lot of history there." He pointed out that fish moves so quickly on the menu that the staff can buy large quantities of it, and that it's "the freshest seafood on Long Island."

Reel owner Lou Matarazzo agreed. "Fish is very difficult to cook — either you do it right, or you kill it," he said. "Adam's fish is phenomenal. He will create something new and fresh with it. He's taken it to another level."

Matarazzo said that Goldgell's personality is an asset in his kitchen. "Adam has this quiet confidence," he said. "He's one of those people who gets the job done. He's a really great chef, and he's come into his own."